

THE NORTH - WEST

# GEORGE FORMBY

## Newsletter 34

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Specially Produced for  
George Formby Fans  
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## Welcome to Newsletter No.34 and we

are very sad to report the death of a dear Crewe member, Ellis Sumner. Ellis, a devoted family man, along with his wife Joyce, and son, Gareth, attended regularly the Crewe and Wintergardens meetings.

Friend of family, Ray Bernard writes:- Ellis, aged 59, of Alsager, Cheshire, suffered a heart attack on Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> March and died in hospital the following morning. His passing was unexpected and came as a great shock to his family and large circle of friends.

Ellis worked as a fireman on the railway during the great days of steam, but with its decline, changed his vocation to security printing which continued until a nervous condition resulted in early retirement in 1992.

Ellis was, however, able to continue with his many interests which included photography, cycling, gardening and D.I.Y projects around the home. He and his family were members of the G.F.S. and our local Alsager Ukulele Club, and attended every meeting with his wife Joyce and son Gareth, whom I have had the pleasure to teach the playing of the ukulele.

The funeral was held at the Bradwell Crematorium on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March and the church was overflowing with relatives and friends wishing to pay their last respects: The British Rail, George Formby Society, The Ukulele Society, and the village of Alsager, - where Ellis spent his entire life - were all well represented. They came to give thanks for the life of a gentle man who's life had made their lives richer. As a personal tribute to his memory I will be continuing Gareth's lessons 'gratis,' as during his lifetime Ellis spared no expense in furthering his son's interest in the playing of the ukulele and I know that he will wish this to continue.

To his dear wife, Joyce, daughter Adele, and Gareth we extend our deepest sympathy. Rest Peacefully Dear Friend. Ray Bernard.

P.S. Joyce asked if I would extend her thanks to all who sent sympathy cards and donations, which will be forwarded to the British Heart Foundation Society.

*Thanks Ray. We all feel so terribly sorry for Ellis's family. The news came as a great shock to us all. Life is so unfair that he should be taken at such an early age.*

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# The Formby Story

Part 23 by Stan Evans

George & Beryl are now married and touring the various theatres. Beryl had to complete her contract, as a double act (The Two Violets) with her sister May before she could take over the role of managing George.

How long this period of completing the contract was we are not quite sure, but we do know that Beryl didn't agree with George singing his father's old hat songs and had every intention of changing his style and performance as soon as possible.



However, George carried on with the old act for at least five years and made studio recordings of songs like: The Man Was A Stranger To Me, Rolling Round Piccadilly, John Willie Come On, I Parted My Hair In The Middle, I Was Always A Willing Young Lad, all of which belonged to his father.

This possibly infuriated Beryl as he was still copying his fathers performances, chatting to the orchestra, part speaking the songs instead of singing, and using the some old tatty stage clothes that were handed down from him.

George was searching for his own style so that he could break away from his droll act. The old songs didn't have the rhythm he was looking for. He told his mother that he was looking for Zaviar Cugat, Cha-Cha type of songs that had a definite beat.

September 1929, however brought a minor breakthrough when George recorded two songs that could be accompanied by the ukulele. He was beginning to find his own style. George recorded "In The Congo" and "All Going Back" which required more of a singing voice and had a beat that could be accompanied. George's uke playing wasn't excellent but this could be worked on. The songs however were getting nearer to what he was searching for and the Cha-Cha beat was the beginning of George's split stroke. He followed this with "I Told My Baby With My Ukulele" but this wasn't published. However it did take him nearer to the style he wanted.

## MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

It was 1932 and for some time George had been chased by a songwriter by the name of Jack Cottrell. He wanted George to buy his song about a Chinaman, with laundry shop, and insisted that the song was ideal for him. The price was £5. "Neigh" said George, "I'm looking for songs about Wigan and Blackpool, not a Chinaman." How wrong he was!

More Next Month.

## Alan Newton's Birthday Party at Crewe

Not only was Alan Newton a Birthday Boy at the Crewe February concert he was also one of the stars of the show. His happy smile and jazzy style was enjoyed by the seventy two that attended. Alan's performance was enhanced by his new "Fred Stevenson" ukulele which gleamed in the limelight.

Carl Basford performed well in his debut as Master of Ceremonies, dressed in his unique 'Plus Fours' he and his associated M/C Alan Chenery, concentrated on continuity which increased everyone's chances of performing two songs. Derrick Jones, all bandaged up, explained to the audience why Murphy was not at work that day. It was hilariously funny and the audience laughed their socks off.

Stan Evans performed yet another miracle. This time a playing card, freely selected by the audience ended up inside a red balloon. Stan finished his act with a great song, "I Don't Know Why I Love You But I Do" de de de de de de. Colin Wood worked hard on the sound system on the day of the concert. He was busy soldering wires an hour or so before the concert! The trial monitor for performers was a success and the society will be purchasing one of these shortly.

What did you think of George peeping round the curtains at the audience. It is another innovation by Steve Hassall who is totally responsible for the stage decor. It has to be said that our concerts are much more colourful as a result of Steve's work. If you want proof just have another look at one of our earlier videos.

And what about Walter Kirkland's first real go on the stage when he sang "Licence." Don Chalkley tackled the difficult "Dare Devil Dick" for the first time and added further to his repertoire. Matthew Kelly sang "Ukulele Lady" and finished up in double time. A great performance, and the 85 year olds best to date.

Arthur Newton, now getting into the Formby stuff, gave a polished performance of "Baby." Barry Bowler took a more serious approach to his act which resulted in considerable success for him. Playing on his baritone uke his performance of "I Must Go Where The Wildgoose goes" and "The Lady Is A Tramp" as well received. Brian sang a Billy Uke Scott number "I've Got A Girl Friend," accompanied by Walter Kirkland and a new member, Ron, on bones.



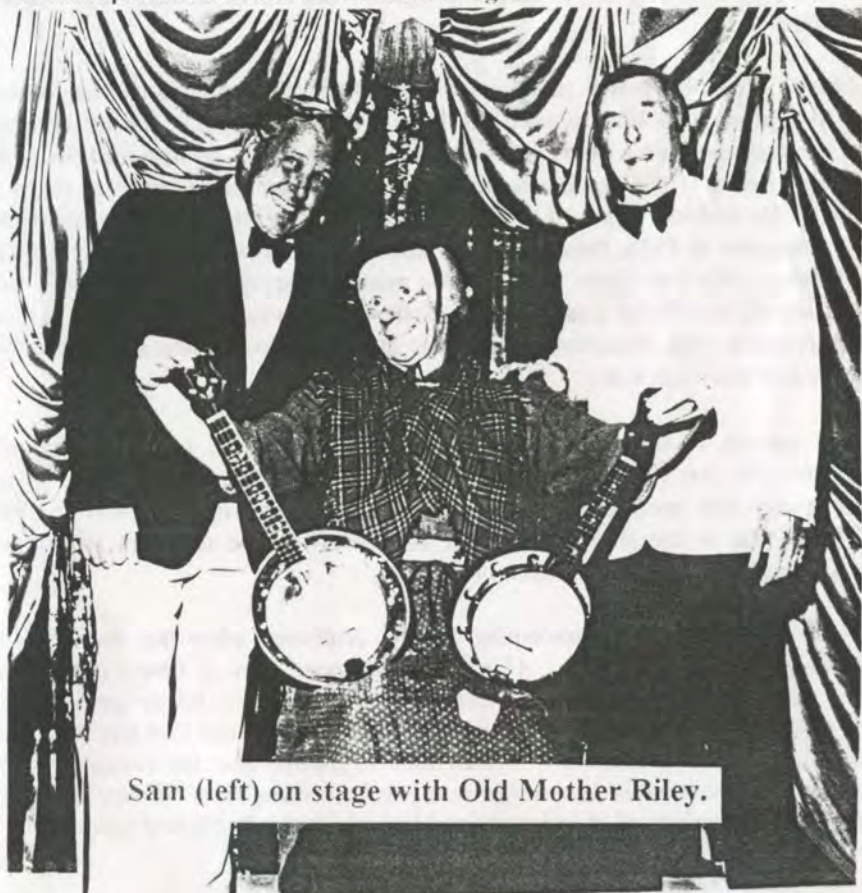
## Report From Sam Bass.

Dear Stan, Just come out of hospital - my poor body being punctured pillaged and plundered after some weeks of poor mayhem. Though now at home, I still unable to taste, swallow or smell properly, but it's so nice to be home. I so much wish to thank the many well wishers in the GFS. Whilst lying in bed with this many cards around, it helped me each day.

John came to the hospital and told me the very sad news of Gareth's father - poor Ellis. John didn't know whether he should break the news or not, but unashamedly it broke my heart. He was such a nice fella. It's funny how his card fell from my table - in the early hours - my being unable to sleep, made me re-read his letter, then a few hours later I got the very sad news.

Though rough, I feel now, at least, I'm still alive and hopefully will get well enough to meet you all again. It's wonderful to have so many dear friends - this is what life is about - and probably it's the only sane thing in an insane world.

It appears that for many years, overworking my voice did me no favours - so they say. But I'm pleased that I made the recordings.



Sam (left) on stage with Old Mother Riley.

## Profile on Stanley Holloway

Stanley Augustus Holloway, was born in Manor Park, East London, 1890, and it is incredible that someone we all know actually started performing - in pierrot troupes - before the First World War. He was the Victorian type of man, never the wrapped-up-in-his-own-little-world specialist of today. During his long career he tackled, successfully, everything. His concert party days gave way to musicals.



In 1929 he first appeared at the Palladium where he decided to break up his songs with something different, he put in his very first monologue, 'Old Sam': 'Sam! Sam! pick up tha musket'. With the help of Marriot Edgar, Bob Weston and Bert Lee he gave a continuous supply of classic pieces that are still remembered today: 'The lion and Albert', (What waste all our lives raising children, to feed ruddy lions? Not me!) 'The Runcorn Ferry' (Two pence, per person, per trip). 'Brahn Boots' (Fancy coming a funeral in brahn boots). Oddly enough most of the monologues were North Country but Stanley was a Cockney.

One of his first film parts was in a Gracie Fields film, 'Sing As We Go' and it was Gracie who persuaded him to take his talents into Variety. Radio, records, musicals, revue, character parts in films - he did the lot. By the mid-fifties he was winding down. He'd made a lot of money and seemed quite content to do as he wished. He had met Alan J Lerner in London and, while in America with the Old Vic Company in 1955, they met again and chatted about a new musical. The rest is history. My Fair Lady is one of the most perfect musicals. Stanley had been waiting all his life for a part like Doolittle. It had everything he was best at, philosophical speeches, roguishness and, best of all, cracking songs that suited his rich music hall baritone voice.

After the success of the show, both here and in America, he flitted happily between the UK and USA doing television, films and a one-man show. Most people of today only remember Stanley as the superlative singer of 'Wiv A Little Bit of Luck' but to the older generation he will always be the man who made Albert a national hero. Stanley died in 1982.

*There was a nice little story concerning Stanley Holloway when they were due to start filming "My Fair Lady." Alan J Lerner spent a lot of time with various members of the cast but ignored Stanley throughout the whole preparation. Stanley was worried thinking that he wasn't good enough for the part and told Alan that he wanted to leave the show. Alan then explained that the reason why he ignored Stanley was because he was the most professional of them all and it was the others, like Rex Harrison, that he was worried about. It was Rex's first musical.*

# Sam Small - by Stanley Holloway

It occurred on the evening before Waterloo, and the troops were lined up on parade  
 And Sergeant inspecting 'em, he was a terror, of whom every man was afraid  
 All excepting one man who was in the front rank, a man by the name of Sam Small  
 And 'im and the Sergeant were both 'daggers drawn' they thought nowt of each other at  
 all

As Sergeant walked past he was swinging his arm and he happened to brush against Sam  
 And knocking his musket clean out of his hands, it fell to the ground with a slam  
 'Pick it up' said Sergeant, abrupt like but cool, but Sam, with a shake of the head  
 Said, 'Seeing as tha' knocked it out of me hand, perhaps tha'll pick the thing up instead

Sam, Sam, pick oop tha' musket, the Sergeant exclaimed with a roar. Sam said,  
 'Tha' knocked it doon, Reet! then tha'll pick it oop or it stays where it is on't floor  
 The sound of high words very soon reached the ears of an officer, Lieutenant Bird  
 Who says to the Sergeant, 'Now what's all this 'ere, and the Sergeant told what occurred

'Sam, Sam, pick oop tha' musket, Lieutenant exclaimed with some heat  
 Sam said, 'He knocked it down, Reet! then he'll pick it oop, or it stays where it is at me  
 feet

It caused quite a stir when the Captain arrived to find out the cause of the trouble  
 And every man there, excepting Sam Small, was full of excitement and bubble

'Sam, Sam, pick oop tha' musket' said Captain, for strictness renowned  
 Sam said, 'He knocked it doon, Reet! then he'll pick it oop or it stays where it is on't  
 ground

The same thing occurred when the Major and Colonel both tried to get Sam to see sense  
 But when old Duke of Wellington came into view, well, the excitement was terribly tense

Up rode the Duke on a lovely white horse, to find out the cause of the bother  
 He looks at the musket and then at old Sam, and he talked to Old Sam like a brother  
 'Sam, Sam, pick oop tha musket,' the Duke said as quiet as could be,  
 Sam, Sam, pick oop tha' musket, coom lad, just to please me.'

'Alright, Duke,' said Old Sam, 'just for thee I'll oblige, and to show that I meant no  
 offence'

Sam picked it up, 'Gradeley lad,' said the Duke, 'Right-o boys, let battle commence.'

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**S.O.S** - James Singleterry, 4 Castle Close, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE30 3EP  
 is looking for the words and chords to "It's Been A Long Time Gone" Can  
 anyone out there help?  
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Just spent a week in Benidorm and on the first night the Spanish lady DJ said,  
 "Welkum laadees und gentulmin. ve vill plaay some raycords for you danse to."

♪ Now Mister Woo was a Chinese man with shop with an old green door ♪ and the second  
 one was "Cleaning Windows." George gets everywhere!

**Werrington Branch** by Derek Ball. Although members were a bit thin on the ground this month we still had a good meeting and aghain we were supported by our friends from Crewe.

I think it must have been "Get Derek Going Week" because first I had a phone call from someone who sounded Pakistani, offering a uke. He said he would bring it to the meeting. A 6.30pm he rang again saying that he was in Warrington and I couldn't get it over to him that we are in Werrington and not Warrington. Well chums this guy (sorry Stan - chap) had me tearing my hair out until inadvertently he let his accent slip. It was none other than Carl Basford taking the "Mick." You'd better be on your guard Carl 'cos I'll get you for it! Then Jon Baddeley made several comment during the concert - I'll get him as well!

The concert was a great success with lots of new members. Sam Bass, all his friends will be pleased to know, had a successful operation and is now out of hospital. He came out on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Obviously he is still poorly but John tells me that he is improving.

*Thanks for the news Derek, Several have asked of Sam's progress.*

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**Derek goes on** with another episode from his Stoke Dictionary - Strugs (Strangers) for the use of. After reading this lot I think it must be a different world out there in the potteries.

Blart = Cry. Chunnuck = Turnip.

Clemmed = Thin, Scrawny, Cold, Hungry.

Fang out on = To catch hold of.

Franked = Late for work,

Keggie = Left Handed (Like Martin Thomas)

Lozock = Laze about. Mard = Cry baby.

Nowt = Naughty person. Raunge = Maul.

Ronk = Rotten. Scrawner = Miser.

Suft = Clout. Skenners = People with a squint.

Sneeped = Snubbed. Strugs = Strangers.

Th'cut = The canal.

*Thanks Derek. Have you no normal people in Stoke who are not Clemmed lozocks, Ronk scrawners, or Sneeped strugs. The next time I go to Stoke I'll try em out. Probably finish up Fanged, Suft, and chucked int' Th'cut.*

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**JUST HEARD** the alarming news that Dennis Lee has had his yellow handbag stolen and he was running around Spain almost "Starkers" chasing the robbers. What is the GFS getting up to?

## UKE CASES -

**Beware . . .** Uke players are warned to beware of paying for uke cases before receiving the goods. One of our members paid a deposit on an £80 case and waited several months. He rang the company who told him that the case was on its way. It didn't arrive so he demanded his money back. He heard nothing so he took out a court summons. Within a few days he received his cash. Anyone wishing to buy a case should ring Peter Lee - who can be recommended - on 01535 690441.



## Another Great Night at Penyffordd by Cliff Royle

We had a change of venue this month because the Legion had been booked for another event. However we still enjoyed the facilities at the Penyffordd Village Institute (which is a cock stride from the Legion) Unfortunately there was no alcohol available unless to were prepared to carry it, in the rain, from the Legion. However excellent sandwiches, crisps and tea were very ably organised by Geoff and Dolwyn Shone. Eat as much as you could, and all included in the 50p admission charge. Beat That!

We had a good evening's entertainment, including acts by the ladies from Crewe. But, only half a miracle from Stan Evans as he couldn't burst his balloon. Dennis Lee wrote, and read out, a nice poem about the forthcoming trip to France on 'the lack of bunk-beds' on board ship, and Brian Edge gave us a new edition of "Back On The Farm", accompanied by Geoff Shone, - which was another miracle because we usually have to drag Geoff on stage.

There was confusion when we were invaded, and I do mean invaded, by a new duo; Frank Murphy (aged 7) and Stephen Ensall (aged 9). Keep it up lads you are doing very well.

### RADIO WALES

One highlight of the evening was the visit by Alan Doulby from Radio Wales who recorded some of our playing, as well as chats with the members. It was rather strange that Alan came on the date as it was the 37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of George's death. A recording of the visit was played the following Sunday afternoon at 1pm.

P.S. When Margaret wants me from under her feet she tells me to go into the other room with my uke and "Get Croaking." I wonder if she thinks I'm a lousy singer? Cliff Royle.

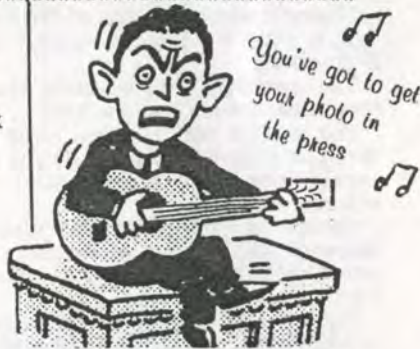
*Thanks Cliff. Young Frank Murphy told me a joke at the meeting: What do you call a country where everybody owns a white car? I give up, what do you call a country where everybody owns a white car? - A white carnation! Very good Frank*

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## Too Heavy To Bear!

You can carry a pack if it's strapped to your back  
 You can carry a weight in your hands  
 You can carry a bundle on top of your head  
 Folks do it in faraway lands

A load will be light if you carry it right  
 Though it weighs just as much as a boulder  
 But one tiny chip is too heavy to bear  
 When it's carried around on your shoulder



You didn't know that Tony Blair played the ukulele, did you?

# D-Day tribute trip by George Formby fans

By David Powell  
Daily Post Staff

GEORGE Formby aficionados from Cheshire are to perform his songs in France, where he played for the beleaguered troops in 1940 and again after D-Day.

George, who is buried in Warrington cemetery, was the last entertainer to be evacuated from Dunkirk during the retreat.

And the Wigan-born singer, with his manager-wife Beryl, was one of the first to return on D-Day.

Avid fan Stan Evans, of Penketh, and 20 fellow-musicians will be in Caen in northern France on June 5, almost 54 years to the day after D-Day, to perform George Formby classics in a concert hall near the one in which he played.

Sixty-nine-year-old Mr Evans said: "I'm not sure how the French will react to *Leaning on a Lamppost* and *When I'm Cleaning Windows*. George was very different to Edith Piaf! We'll just have to see how it goes."

## Classics

Mr Evans and fellow-members of the George Formby Society's Warrington branch will perform classics such as *Our Sergeant Major* and *Out In The Middle East*.

"There'll also be a touch of the Vera Lynns with *We'll Meet Again*," Mr Evans said.

The musicians will be using traditional instruments from the 1940s.

The 500-seat hall has been hired by the Royal British Legion and British ex-servicemen and women will be welcome.

George, whose tombstone in Warrington is engraved with musical instruments, travelled extensively during the war to entertain the troops.

But Mr Evans and his friends have no plans to take their show anywhere but France.

One of Mr Evans's most treasured possessions is a copy of a logbook of George's war-time travels.



Don't Forget  
Your  
Passport  
For France

□ ALLIES are entertained: George sings an impromptu number for American troops near the front in France in 1944

"It shows he once entertained 68,400 people by doing 41 shows in 20 days," Mr Evans said.

"Another time, he performed to 111,000 troops in 59 shows over 30 days.

"He sang in commandeered holiday camps, hospitals, universities and even the Beirut cinema."

## 'I'm not sure how the French will react to *Leaning on a Lamppost* and *When I'm Cleaning Windows*'

George's wife took messages from troops and relayed them back to their families.

Mr Evans said: "People said she was a dragon but she wasn't. She read out messages from soldiers.

"One said To Mr and Mrs Cotterill. Met Sammy in Souses Hospital. He was feeling very fit and well and hopes you are all the same.

Missing your fried tomatoes, Mum. We can get plenty of tomatoes here but we can't get them fried."

Beryl died on Christmas Day, 1960, George on March 6, 1961.

His doctor said: "He had an inherent honesty and simplicity that only great men have."

Mr Evans also has a personal reason for going to Caen.

His brother, Regimental Sergeant-Major Edward Evans, of the South Lancashire Regiment, was killed in action there aged 27 and is buried in one of the British military cemeteries.

To sign up for the £94.50 D-Day coach trip, ring Mr Evans on 01925-271102, or Dennis Lee on 01244-544799.

The Warrington branch of the George Formby Society holds special meetings at the Alliance Sports and Social Centre, Evans House, Orford Lane, Warrington. Phone either of the above numbers for details.

There are other branches of the society in Crewe and Liverpool.

## Downhearted - No!!

### D DAY TRIP TO FRANCE

Dennis Lee has just heard that all the sleeping berths on the boat have been booked and we will have to be satisfied with kipping down on the reclining seats. Well, in my opinion, this is no problem. The Army lads didn't have any luxury on the D Day crossing and George & Beryl roughed it throughout their entire tour.

But how's this for dedication? Dennis sat up all night composing this special limerick for you. . . .

He didn't even have a recliner!

### D Day Trip To France

Now you've heard of the Normandy beaches  
And the trip we've arranged, I dare say  
We'll be going ont' coach down to Portsmouth  
And be playing our ukes all the way

When we get on the boat for the crossing  
And the ferry has slung off its hooks  
We can all wander off to the lounge bar  
And liven em up with our ukes

And when we all feel a bit tired  
And the thought of a bed starts to pull  
We'll all have to sleep on recliners  
Cos they've told us the cabins are full

But we're not bothered about cabins  
When we think of our soldiers int' war  
Crossing the Channel, lay down on duck boards  
And even our George kipped ont' floor

So don't be downhearted about it  
Recliners are comfy it's said  
Married couples can shove em together  
And pretend they're at home in bed

Every cloud has a silvery lining  
And although cabins are out of our reach  
Just think of the brass you'll be saving  
It works out at 16 quid each

CONTINUED OVER

It is important is that we follow in George's footsteps and go over there to entertain the old veterans who fought for our country. Kevin Blanchfield is rallying his British Legion troops together to fill the concert hall and Dennis Lee is setting out a programme for the concert.

**SO - BE PROFESSIONAL** - well as near as!!!

Any players travelling with us, and wishing to be in the concert, are asked to work on their song (s) to give the show a touch of professionalism. It is essential also that we don't have two or three members singing the same songs. To avoid this Dennis will be asking for a list of songs that are to be performed.

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## Huge Surplus of Vellums brings Funds from the

GFS. The GFS branches are always looking for different ways to swell the funds and at the latest Committee meeting Dennis Lee came up with the idea of donating (free) 100 old Vellum Magazines to each of the branches. These could be sold to non-members and the cash could be kept by the branch. A selling price of 50p or £1 each was suggested. The Committee agreed and Dennis has been busy distributing the books. Good thought Dennis!

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One of **George's** favourites, Ukulele Ike Edwards, appeared in the opening shots of "That's Entertainment" which was screened on Sky TV on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January on the TNT channel. He opened up the show with "Singing In The Rain" using a small wooden uke, and it sounded really great.

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**Be Professional** - It is always pleasing to see the Branch Meetings full to capacity and plenty of members waiting to go up on stage. The only problem is that success usually limits the players to 'one song only' otherwise not everyone gets a chance to play.

Well here is the answer: Practise like the merry dickens and get a professional spot put together. Throw plenty of variety into your act - Sing a rousing song, tell a joke, sing a comical song, talk to the audience, sing a ballad and put the whole thing over as if you were doing a 20 minute spot at the London Palladium.

When you've perfected your act - and you are pleased with the result - come along to one of the less attended meetings - like Liverpool or Blackpool - and give us your full 20 minute act. It's a wonderful opportunity for the would-be pro. and the crowd is sympathetic to anyone who has the nerve to "Have A Go."

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**LATE NEWS** - Just heard that Bill Turner, who hosts the Werrington meeting, is recovering from a quadruple bypass operation. Bill lives at 9 Park Ave, Werrington ST9 0EE, and I'm sure he'd like to hear from you. You look like a tough nut to crack Bill so we hope and trust you'll have a speedy recovery.

# Michael Johnson

was born in 1891 which makes him 107 years of age and possibly the country's oldest man. He is a resident in a Surrey nursing home and the matron describes him as still amazingly spry. He began learning the ukulele when Queen Victoria was on the throne. Later he fought in the First World War and after that he spent over 30 years playing with a number of bands by night and teaching by day.

## TAUGHT GEORGE

Among his most famous pupils was George Formby, but he remembers "Rock & Roll" was the end of the big bands. He said that he could have taken up the guitar but he was 65 when it happened. Michael retired in 1965.



Michael, who's eldest son is 81 years of age, has over 20 great, great, great, great grandchildren. When he was asked if he would get his ukulele out his son said, "I expect so. He's never disappointed anyone yet."

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**STUPID!!!** - This ruling of the GFS that members are not allowed access to other members names and addresses is a most inane rule that can only lead to loss of membership. We've lost all contact with outside members and this is felt more so when tragedies like the death of a member occurs and several members are ringing around asking for addresses and phone numbers. The only reply we can give is, - "We don't know!" Which is extremely negative!

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**DARK HORSES** - What a shock we had at Liverpool when we found that Des Redfern is quite a good songwriter. He wrote a great little song all about the Crewe Railway which went down very well, (the song I mean) - great words! Also, we'd another shock when we found that Paul Robinson plays the Keyboard and is currently producing his own backing tapes. So the Liverpool branch is now in the market for a Keyboard so that we can create our own backing group.

**Albert Seaborn**, of Manchester, has just visited Ashton U Lyne and located Hodgson Street where George's father, James Booth (GF Senior) was born. The old houses are now replaced by council flats on one side and a new fire station on the other.

Albert enclosed a copy of the Ashton Reporter 31/12/97

Ashton born George Formby senior - the man who began the jokes about Wigan Pier - was just as popular as his son. Indeed on the large headstone of the grave, the two men share in Warrington Cemetery, it states: "A Tradition Nobly Upheld".

At the turn of the century, George Formby senior was the biggest star in the music hall, earning, it is said, £300 per week in 1900. If that is true the sum was colossal. Whatever the facts about his wealth, his wife and seven children were very well provided for.

Underlining his popularity, the Reporter commented, "He was born in Ashton, and Ashton was immensely proud of him." His obituary, which was published on February 12, 1921 read: "He was a top liner, and takes his place in the gallery of famous comedians of his day." He was born in 1875 and baptised at St Mary's RC Church.

Contrasting starkly with condition at the end of his life, Formby's early days were ones of hardship and poverty. Although he was constantly hungry he was proud of the fact that he never turned to theft. Formby made his first money selling newspapers, although he also went from house to house asking for coppers and the generosity he encountered impressed him deeply.

He did this in tandem with another boy and the two would also busk on street corners, hoping to make a few pennies. Although his fortunes fluctuated at the start, and he had to work in a loom shop, his wages began to increase. He made 35 shillings, then £3 and, in Dublin, £4.10shillings.

However, perhaps as a result of the poverty he endured as a boy, Formby suffered from tuberculosis throughout his life. It was this that claimed his life. He was taken ill while appearing in the pantomime "Jack & Jill" at Newcastle and died at his home, Hill Crest at Stockton Heath, Warrington.

*Thanks Albert for the article - very interesting. Anthony and I did a show in Ashton some years back and when we told them that George's father was born there they were very surprised. Possibly many locals don't know this.*

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**We want** all your little news items - Has your cat had kittens and you've called one "George?" If you've any news items like this send em in.

# From Martin Thomas - Crewe Branch

## Spare A Thought for the Left Hander

Not many of us in the GFS are left handed but we do have our problems with our sloping writing and playing the uke etc. Reading the chords and having to reverse them in your head for example, or going to the Wintergardens and looking at the ukes on the sales table and not being able to try them out because they are usually set for a right handed player. Getting up on stage and going through the rigmarole of switching the mikes round, or being invited on a group photo and standing out like a chump being the only one with the uke the wrong way round.

It does, however, have its compensations, as no-one picks up your uke to play unless your name is Paul McCartney, Martin Hosmer or myself, Martin Thomas.

*Thanks Martin.*

*So let's spare a thought for young Martin  
At playing right hand he's a dud  
He's tried up-side-down through a mirror  
But it doesn't sound terribly good*

*Whenever he goes up to Blackpool  
And tries out a uke on the stall  
He finds that it's tuned for the right hand  
So he can't play the damn thing at all*

*But I've noticed that clever dick Mason  
Who handles the uke quite so deft  
Picks out the chords with his right hand  
And strums up and down with his left*

*So take my advice Martin Thomas  
And watch what the young ones can do  
They'll teach you to play ambidextrous  
Then you can play right-handed too.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Just received**  
a card from Anthony  
Mason who is doing  
a tour of Japan with  
the Ged Hone Jazz  
Band. He writes:-  
Everyone hear is  
very polite and they  
bow all the time. No  
chip shops but plenty  
of raw fish.  
Learning to play the  
uke with chopsticks.  
See you soon -  
Anthony.

**Derek Ball** is having problems with his computer linked fax machine. Every time he presses a particular button (he's not sure which one) it sends out faxes to anyone who has a fax machine. Now he was telling me that Tony Blair received six copies of the Werrington report last week and I know that he isn't exaggerating because I received five copies of the same report. It's a good job that Derek isn't working for M.I.5.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Anthony** also mentioned on his card (above) that the Japanese have difficulty in understanding his sense of humour. Well, what's so unusual about that! We have difficulty in understanding him over here as well!

# Another Treat for Crewe. The Nantwich

EVENTS:- Beginning Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April.  
Blues in the Ballroom 8pm to 11pm, Crown Hotel.

## SATURDAY

Bill Basey Big Band 11am to 3pm, on the Square.  
Trad Jazz, 3pm to 6pm, Crown Hotel.  
The Pasadena Roof Orchestra 8pm to 11pm, Civic Hall.

## SUNDAY

Wabash Jazzmen, 12pm to 2pm, Frog & Ferret.  
The Gravy Train, 12pm to 2pm, The Shakespeare.  
Ken Jackson Tribute Band, 12pm to 2pm, Railway Hotel.  
Salt City Jazzmen, 1pm to 3pm, Malbank Hotel.  
The Fabulous Blues Roosters, 2pm to 4pm, Union Vaults.  
Terry Butters Band, 2pm to 4pm, Wilbraham Arms.  
The Mambos, 2pm to 4pm, Crown Hotel.  
Derek Harrison Trio, 2pm to 4pm, Ye Olde Vaults.  
Mad Dog, 3pm to 5pm, White Horse.  
JJQ Quartet, 3pm to 5pm, Lamb Hotel.  
Skeleton Crew, 3pm to 5pm, Bowling Green.  
Jazz In The Ballroom, 4pm to 6pm, Crown Hotel.  
T.J. Johnson, 4pm to 6pm, Black Lion.  
The Fabulous Blues Roosters, 6pm to 8pm, Railway Hotel.  
Ken Jackson Tribute Band, 6pm to 7pm, The Shakespeare.  
Mad Dog, 6pm to 8pm, Frog & Ferret.  
Terry Butters Band, 6pm to 8pm, Malbank Hotel.  
Wabash Jazzmen, 7pm to 9pm, Union Vaults.  
GEORGE FORMBY SOCIETY, 7pm to 9pm, WILBRAHAM ARMS.

JJQ Jazzmen, 7pm to 9pm, Ye Olde Vaults.  
Salt City Jazzmen, 8pm to 10pm, White Horse.  
Climax Blues Band, 8pm to 11pm, Civic Hall.  
Derek Harrison Trio, 9pm to 11pm, Lamb Hotel.  
The Mambos, 9pm to 11pm, Bowling Green.  
Madison Blues Band, 9pm to 11pm.  
Blue "C", 9pm to 11pm, Black Lion.

## MONDAY

Gary Potter, 5pm to 7pm, Union Vaults.  
Bill Basey Quintet, 12pm to 2pm, Wilbraham Arms.  
Gary Boyle, 1pm to 3pm, Railway Hotel.  
Shades of Django, 1pm to 3pm, Lamb Hotel.  
Jane Wolfes Jazz In Fusion, 1pm to 3pm, Bowling Green.  
Skeleton Crew, 2pm to 4pm, Ye Olde Vaults  
Blue "C", 4pm to 6pm, Frog & Ferret.  
Dave Richmond Band, 5pm to 7pm, White Horse.  
Jane Wolfes Jazz Infusion, 5pm to 7pm.  
Gary Potter, 5pm to 7pm, Malbank Hotel.  
Gary Boyle, 5pm to 7pm, The Shakespeare.

Jazz Festival will be held again on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> of April (Easter weekend) and like last year they are expecting a very busy time in the town. The Crewe branch of the G F S - along with friends from other branches - are performing again, and expecting another packed house. The programme reads:- "The return of this wonderful Tribute Society - one of last year's busiest gigs."

## Penketh - July 4th

And you are welcome to come and play at our Annual Penketh Carnival on Saturday July 4<sup>th</sup> when we are supplied with a Marquee and chairs to accommodate about fifty visitors. We have a great day and the sun always shines in Penketh. After the event we retire to 19 Hall Nook where Eva lays on a good 'nosh up' (not used in Stoke) and everybody has a good time. See You Here.

Bill Basey Big Band, 7pm to 9pm, Crown Hotel.  
 Jake Field, 8pm to 10pm, Black Lion.  
 King Pleasure and the Biscuit Boys, 8.15pm - Civic Hall.

## BIG PARADE

Local schools and community groups have been working with artists to decorate umbrellas and create a New Orleans style Jazz Parade. The colourful procession of jazzed up brollies will parade through the town to launch the Festival of Easter on Easter Saturday.

If you would like to take part in this project please contact Angela Chappel on 01270 537234. The parade starts at 1pm at the Nantwich Civic Hall, led by a traditional New Orleans Jazz Band and children from all over the country with their decorated umbrellas.

There are charges of between £5 to £10 for main events only and details of these will be given on; Civic Hall 01270 628433, Tourist Office 01270 610983, Crewe Lyceum Theatre 01270 537243, Crown Hotel 01270 625283, which is also the Credit card Hotline.

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## Who Created Wigan Pier?

The argument continues. Did George Formby Senior or George Orwell put Wigan Pier on the road to fame? The story goes that it was Formby who created the joke for a cheap laugh. But without doubt, Orwell made Wigan Pier famous all over the world. There are some who say that the Pier legend has made Wigan a laughing stock. And there are others who maintain that, but for the Pier joke, Wigan would have been as anonymous as Bolton, Warrington or St Helens. In fact there has never been a pier at Wigan Pier . . . Just a coal tipper.

In his book, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, George Orwell doesn't mention his search for the pier. That came in a radio broadcast later when he told millions of listeners that he had come to Wigan, looking for the pier but failed to find it. Decades ago the canal was at the centre of Wigan's industrial life but the warehouses fell into disuse and famous Wigan Pier began to rot away.

In the 1970s the Pier was derelict and Wigan Council was within a whisper of demolishing it. In fact the rumour has always circulated that a local councillor said the best way of dealing with the Pier was to put a lighted match under it and build houses on the site. Thankfully other councillors were more far sighted. The Pier has been turned into a giant leisure complex and is now visited by people from all over the world.

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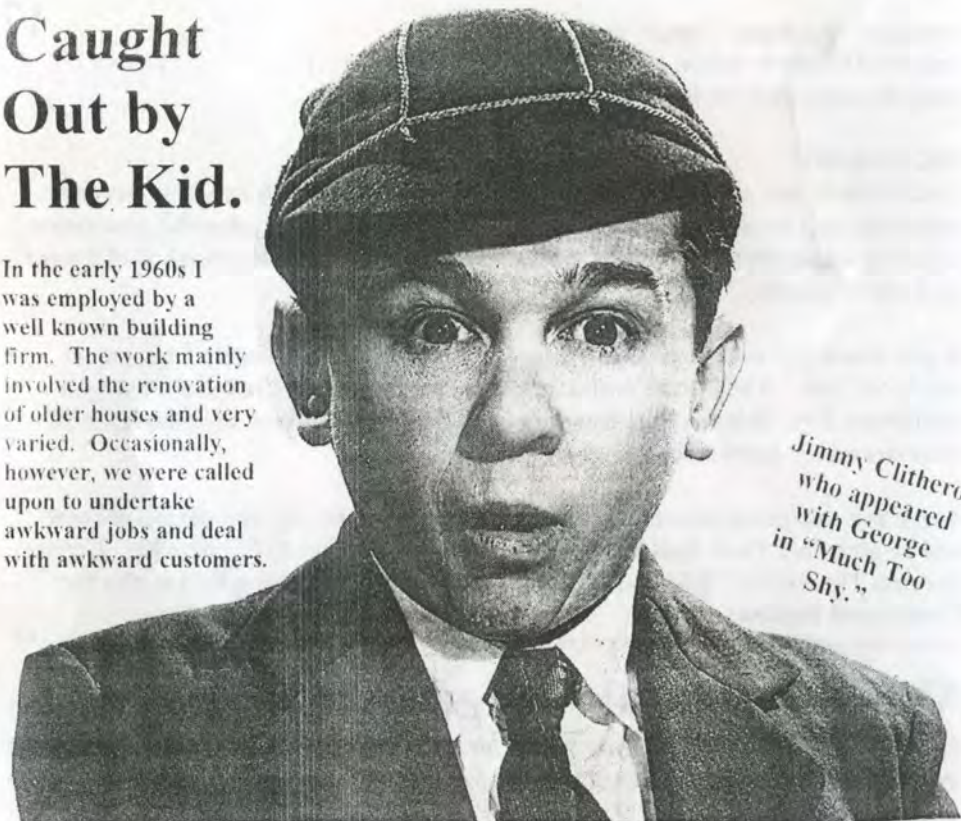
## VANDALS!!

- A small group from Crewe went out to celebrate Colin Wood's birthday and some cheeky whippersnapper stole Pat Chenery's wheelchair, which was later found outside the cemetery gates. Was it a ghost? Brrrrrrr.



# 18 Caught Out by The Kid.

In the early 1960s I was employed by a well known building firm. The work mainly involved the renovation of older houses and very varied. Occasionally, however, we were called upon to undertake awkward jobs and deal with awkward customers.



*Jimmy Clitheroe  
who appeared  
with George  
in "Much Too  
Shy."*

One such job which springs to mind went as follows: We had been called in at short notice to completely modernise a bungalow at Bispham. From the moment we set foot on the job the gremlins got in. Anything that could go wrong did! Although we had never met the owner we were assured by our boss that he was an important person, and furthermore he wasn't easy to please.

Not only that but as the boss was leaving that day he informed us that the owner would be visiting the house next day and that we had better get the job tidied up and looking in top condition - or else. We spent all that day cleaning the site, all rubble was removed and we were ready for the inspection.

Whilst in the kitchen enjoying a well earned brew and congratulating ourselves on a job well done, Tommy, the foreman shouted to me to run outside as a young kid was playing on a newly delivered pile of building sand. As instructed, I shot outside and there for sure was a boy in school uniform looking at the sand. "Hey you, clear off you little so-and-so," I shouted at him. With that the boy spun round and in a strange high pitched voice he cried, "Who the heck do you think you are talking to, this is my house."

Well I've never felt so "Gobsmacked" as I was that day for the kid was no other than Jimmy Clitheroe the famous child impersonator. It seems he had decided to come earlier that day to try to catch us on the hop. It was quite some time before I could live it down.

## Good Old Dad - We lost Mum last year and thought



Dad would never get over it. But early this year he rekindled his youth by joining a Banjo Club (George Formby Society) He'd had a ukulele when he was a lad for which he paid 1s 6d by instalments.

The frame of his present banjo was hanging in the garage roof, rusty and forgotten. He retrieved it and spent six weeks renovating it. He's so happy to be playing again after all these years. We, his five daughters, are all so very proud of his achievement, so late in life, and happy at the way he has not let his grief over mum spoil the remainder of his life.

*What a wonderful story, which was sent in to the Yours Magazine by Matthew Kelly's daughters. Well we are very pleased for you Matthew and hope you continue to enjoy the meetings. Have we any more happy little stories like this? Apologies for the quality of the photo, which was dark.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Derek Ball writes again

(you can't keep this lad out of the Newsletter) - Did you see the television programme "Jonathan Creek" this week?

It concerned several men who died of fright after they had looked through a certain window in an old public house. When Jonathan Creek's female side kick was told about this she exclaimed, "Do you mean to tell me that George Formby was outside on a ladder?" CHEEKY WAZACK! What did she mean?

*I don't know what she meant Derek but I do know that my computer has accepted the word 'Wazack' without any objections so I suppose it is a genuine word and not one you've made up.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Blackpool Evening Gazette 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1943

## Strenuous Service

- I have further news of George & Beryl Formby who recently went by air to the north of Scotland to entertain the forces there. Writing to Coun Tom Roberts of Fleetwood, Beryl says, "On our way by plane from London to the Orkneys, George & I practically lived on Fleetwood fish, which we ate cold.

Of the flight, Beryl says it was rough travelling. On a 1800 miles trip they did 23 shows in seven days and their journey back to Edinburgh was made in a gale. "When we landed," she said "we were told we were the only aircraft in the sky. Anyhow we are both feeling fit and now back in London."

# N. West Meetings and Future Dates

**North Wales Branch** - British Legion, Penyffordd (10 miles from Chester)

Every first Fri in the Month. Tel Dennis Lee on 01244 544799 Adm 50p

**Blackpool** - Wainwright, Hornby Rd, B/pool - Every 1st Sat. in the month -  
Tel Eye Stewart on 01253 768097 - Future Dates: - Apr 4<sup>th</sup>, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Jun 6<sup>th</sup>, July  
4<sup>th</sup>, NOTE - AUGUST 22<sup>nd</sup>, NO SEPTEMBER MEETING, Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>, Nov 7<sup>th</sup>,  
Dec 5<sup>th</sup>. Adm £1 with Buffet. All are made very - very - very welcome.

**Liverpool** - Broadgreen Conservative Club - Every 2nd Friday in the month -  
Ring Tom Bailey on 0151 289 1711 Players Urgently Wanted

**Sale** - Woodheys Club, 299 Washway Rd, Sale - Dates are now settled - Every  
3rd Friday - Ring Ken Ratcliffe on 0161 430 8290. Adm £1

**Crewe Branch** Wistaston Memorial Hall - Ring Brian Edge on 01270 69836  
Future dates - Sat 28<sup>th</sup> Mar, Sat 18<sup>th</sup> Apr, Fri 29<sup>th</sup> May, Sat 27<sup>th</sup> June, Fri 24<sup>th</sup>  
July, Fri 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, Sat 26<sup>th</sup> Sep, Fri 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct, Fri 27<sup>th</sup> Nov, Fri 18<sup>th</sup> Dec. Adm 50p.  
Get there early for a seat.

**Warrington** Alliance Sports & Social Centre, Evans House, Orford Lane,  
Warrington - Stan Evans on 01925 727102 - SPECIAL MEETINGS ONLY.

**Werrington Branch** (Near Stoke) at the Werrington Village Hall - Every  
2nd Thursday in the month, Ring Bill Turner on 01782 304858.

To receive the N. West Newsletter by post please send a cheque for  
50p + 25p pp. (or £2.25 for 3 months) payable to Stan Evans -  
Address on front cover. Organisers can order a minimum  
lot of 10 copies for £3 plus 60p postage and you  
are welcome to sell them to help raise funds.

Deadline for next issue - 18th April.

So as George would say -

**“Get Cracking”**

**Support Your Newsletter**

\*\*\*\*\*  
**See Page 15** - Just received another copy of  
the Werrington report from Derek Ball. That's the  
sixth this month!

